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ABSTRACT

A critical analysis of the field practice component of early childhood teacher education is presented. As used here, the term "practice" includes on- and off-campus student teaching programs that provide preservice experiences for persons intending to work with children from birth to eight years of age and lead to a two-year diploma or a three- or four-year degree. Underlying the analysis are two major assumptions. The first is that the practice component is a valid and justifiable part of a preservice early childhood education program, regardless of its form and duration; the second is that field-based experiences serve to socialize prospective teachers into established patterns of practice and into existing arrangements. Addressed in the analysis are issues concerning (1) the timing and sequence of practice, (2) varieties of placement sites, (3) assessment and evaluation in early childhood education preservice teacher education programs, and (4) the roles of supervisors and their relationship with students and the content and process of supervision. Relevant research findings on each topic are reported and recommendations are offered. (RH)

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THE FIELD PRACTICE COMPONENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRESERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMS

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The field practice component of the preservice education program is widely regarded as the most useful element in the professional education by students and teacher educators alike.

> There is no other sequence of study which has a more profound impact upon the college student than the experience of student teaching. It is almost universally advocated by critics and friends of education alike as a process for teacher certification and its practice is virtually unquestioned.(Henry and Beasley, 1977, pviii)

Unfortunately, in teacher education, there are many conflicts between ways and means. Students are unable to receive the individual help they need. Cooperating teachers are often overworked and ill-prepared to provide the time and kind of feedback that is so vital. Practice supervisors or advisors are generally overloaded with trainees and limited observation time. Then too, practice sites offering the student good models and good relevant feedback are often difficult to find. Further, practice times are all too often insufficient, ill sequenced, or both. Yet in spite of these obstacles, and the immense variety of practice experiences for students, the practice component has much to justify its continued existence. Such justifications may be found by examining some of the practice components.

The basic premise underlying the rationale for the field practice experience is that direct involvement with the role to be assumed will Be more effective in facilitating the acquisition of desired teaching behaviours than will remote, abstract, vicarious or simulated experiences. The nature of this field practice component has been described in the recent NAEYC guidelines as follows

> Practice provides candidates with a variety of supervised field experiences with children and families. Field experiences such as observations, co-participation with teachers and student teaching provide candidates with the opportunity to apply their knowledge in practical situations and exposes candidates to a diversity of early childhood settings.(NAEYC,1982)

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In spite of this importance, the field practice component has generally escaped critical analysis directed at teacher education programs.

Despite the general approval and face

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> validity of practice teaching, there is accumulating evidence that points to a need to either rationalize current practices or to develop reasoned alternatives. (Sanders, 1974)

This paper proposes such an analysis. Theories and research will be considered relevant to the following issues;types of field practice locations, timing and sequence features, roles of cooperating teachers, principals and faculty advisors, and evaluation practices. Finally, some recommendations will be made contingent upon the analysis.

The practical component of teacher education and training programs has been given many names. For the purpose of this paper, the term practice will be used in the widest sense to include student teaching, both on and off the campus of the training institution.

It is also important, initially, to specify the program for which the practice is a component. During our recent history, the training of teachers has been the domain of traditional academic institutions - normal schools, teachers colleges and multipurpose colleges and universities. This has not always been the case. Nor will this be the case of the future. During the depression in the United States, for example, many special institutes were created to retrain teachers from all levels to work in the WPA nursery shools. More recently Head Start and other programs have shown that noninstitutionally-based training programs can be mounted effectively and that traditional institutional patterns can be modified to accommodate new teachig strategies. In Ontario, as in other Canadian provinces, courses are available for nannies, day care personnel, preschool teachers, child-care workers, etc for periods ranging from a few months to four years. For the purposes of this paper, the term practice shall refer to that which is a component of either a two year diploma, or a three to four year degree program which has the primary purpose of providing a professional preservice education for people to work with children 0 - eight years.

Underlying this analysis are two major assumptions.. The first is that the practice component is a valid and justifiable component of a preservice early childhood education program, regardless of its form and duration. The second assumption is less positive. It is based on a position stated by Zeichner (1980) that field based experiences are conservative institutions which serve to socialize prospective teachers into established patterns of practice and into existing arrangements . Students should be viewed as active agents, and the practice as a dynamic social event.

How the practice is planned and implemented by the curriculum designers and the faculty of any particular institution or program is contingent upon the underlying philosophy of what teaching is, and of what then a teacher education program ought to do. These philosophies

may be ranked along a continuum. At one end is the view that teaching is 'peopleteaching' (Smith, 1974). The main task is to enhance personal functioning and interpersonal relations. Teacher education for this role is described by Coombs as a "process of becoming..of personal discovery"(1976). Within this perspective, practice becomes a personal proving ground for testing one's own reactions and observing and evaluating the reactions of others.

At the opposite end of the continuum is the view that teaching is a science with the aims of education stemming from the roots of experimental psychology and tHe academic disciplines. Education for this teacher role is primarily technical. The ingredients are academic programs focusing on theoretical and philosophical propositions and practical experiences focusing on the technical skills of teaching and managing children in a group setting.

The median perspective might be termed 'functional teacher education (Hilliard, 1974). This is predicated upon the belief that the role of early childhood education is to proceed from what is known about the growth of young children to the facilitation of that growth in the richest possible learning environment. This involves highly complex interpersonal transactions with teachers who have the information and skills to provide this facilitative environment. Katz has defined this teaching as

> a pattern of conduct..having the four interrelated dimensions; role definitions, teaching style, teaching techniques and professional identification. (Katz, 1974)

Based on this functional perspective Ward (1974) states

> the bulk of teacher education must take place in settings where the teacher is in close, continuing prolonged contact with many kinds of children under conditions which maximize feedback on what that teacher does with children.

Timing and Sequence

Practice can vary in terms of the time at which it occurs in the training program. It may be at the beginning, the middle, the end or intermittently in between. Sequencing refers to the temporal order in which the practice occurs; how activities follow each other or certain academic courses, occur simultaneously or preceed courses and practice periods. Currently there is pressure for earlier rather than later field experiences. One strong argument in favour of early practice is that it provided trainees with opportunities to 'try on' the teacher role and to make an informed career choice prior to the completion of a large portion of their required work. Another argument is that simultaneous as well a subsequent course work acquires greater relevance when such 'trying' on has occurred. No evidence to support these arguments has been found although they seem to be common sense and to have face validity.

Issues in timing and sequencing serve to remind us that one cannot enter any social role or occupation as a veteran and that it is helpful to think of students as experiencing developmental stages. The following phases of student teaching have been identified by Caruso (1977).

(i) anxiety-euphoria - high expectations in terms of personal performance and the rewards of accomplishment

(ii) confusion - clarity - perceptions of the classroom and what is transpiring is narrow

(iii) competennce - inadequacy - crucial influences now from the advisor, cooperating teacher relative to the student's self-confidence. Thus strengths need positive reinforcement as a basis for building competence, and fostering a positive attitude for growth. Issues relating to discipline and control become paramount.

(iv) criticism - new awareness - still prevalence of concerns about self, now greater thought and attention to children and professional issues

(v) more confidence - greater inadequacy

(vi) loss-relief - reassessment and reflection. Practice now can reduce frustration, tension and ambivalence.

Grossman (1980) reports on a study of the comparison of the effectiveness of student teachers who had early field practice experiences with those who had not. Combinations of practice before the course, combined with practice of four weeks during and a quarter semester following the course, was compared with practice schedule of four weeks following the courses balanced with a mid-term practicum. Supervisors evaluated the involved students on twelve characteristics. The results indicated that those who had the second combination, that is without the early practice were rated as showing more self-confidence, working better with others and displaying more professional attitudes. Even though the students with the early field practice experience in fact had somewhat more practice time, it was the group of students without this experience who were deemed the most effective.

The results were re-examined comparing students who were initially judged as superior. For these students the difference was less significant. Grossman comments that the nature of the placement was not considered, and it could be that it is the interactive effect of certain students with certain placements which is the most influential variable.

It may also be that less mature students as a group are more susceptible to the socializing influences of the setting and of the relationship with the cooperating teacher. This mitigates against much early practice when conservative conformity could be accentuated.

The amount of time allotted for practice varies greatly. Yet this feature of field practice has little or no research evidence to support current practice.

In Ontario, for example, many two year diploma courses in the community colleges provide upwards of 500 hours of supervised practice. Yet in many teacher education programs of one year duration, the average is closer to 200 hours. In the four years at Ryerson, students complete upwards of 900 hours . Recently the Association for Early Childhood Education, Ontario took a stand on the field practice component of training programs and recommends 500 hours in its training program guidelines.

Not only has the most effective time not been underpinned by research, but also the manner in which this is apportioned. Is it preferable to have two long practice periods, or four short ones? Is is more effective to make the practice massed or distributed? What percentage of the student's time ought to be devoted to observation only? To direct practice with the children? The problem is that we simply do not have the supporting evidence from valid research to guide our decisions.

Similar issues surround the sequencing of practice. Is it more appropriate that experiences with different age groups follow the age sequence? How should the practice relate to course work? Is it more advantageous an more efficient if students , for example, follow a course on reading with a placement in classrooms where reading instruction is a primary activity, or should the students undertake the placement during the course ? All too often the rationale for the sequencing of the practice and course work is not predicated upon a foundation of research support, but rather is one of administrative expediency.

Based on the limited evidence available, the following suggestions are offered -

1. when early practice is provided, attempts should be made to match the student to the placement. This might be done through a counselled self-selection on the part of the student.

2. Initial or early field practice experiences should be of limited duration and in a variety of settings. This permits increased opportunities for 'trying on' a variety of teacher roles.

3. Self-evaluation through the use of audio and video tapes and student journals be encouraged, particularly in early placements. This gives the teacher education advisor an opportunity to note and respond more suitably to the student's developmental needs.

Placement Sites

As early childhood educators are increasingly serving a broader clientele than a decade ago, including more children with a greater variety of special needs, more diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and from a broader range of socio-economic family units, this raises the question of the abilify of the teacher education programs to suitably provide students with the variety of practice experiences to fit them for these increasingly diverse roles. Examination of many programs reveals

attempts to expand the more traditional placements, to include other types while still keeping the focus on children and their development and their learning. Placement types at Ryerson, for example, include involvement with parent groups and a multicultural setting in addition to those with children from infants through eight years.

Unfortunately, in many communities, access to quality placement sites can be difficult. This is particularly true in the ECE field. Early experiences in 'bad' classrooms seem to engender negative goals for the students may be led to believe that such settings are typical or common. They then accept the practices they observe as though they are the upper or outer limits of what is possible in programs.

Increasingly the placement site is coming under scrutiny by teacher educators. In a recent study, Becher and Ade(1982) report the use of a placement site assessment instrument. Their research was directed towards what in fact constitutes a good placement and a good placement experience. They defined this as one that results in positive professional growth and in the acquisition of identified desired teaching behaviours. They identified three categories of site criteria

-the modelling of good teacher behaviour
-feedback to students
-opportunities for innovation on the part of the students

The characteristic which appeared to correlate most significantly with the higher final ratings of the students was the second named above; feedback to students. The researchers explained that the students perceived the practice as a situation where they were to develop and practice, not merely learn by watching models. They were consequently, more concerned about what they could do. Thus the most powerful influence was the nature and amount of the feedback available to them. Unexpectedly, th modelling feature of the placement was of little or very low significance in relation to the final performance ratings. During the first and final placements, the opportunity for innovation on the part of the student was important. However, this did not appear to be an influential factor during other placement periods. The results of the use of this site assessment instrument helped the faculty to make placement assignments which would ameliorate some of the undesirable effects of the practice as becoming more authoritarian, restrictive, controlling and impersonal, custodial and less humanistic.

In the research report, Becher and Ade list eight succesful effects of the field practice as follows -

-to improve general teaching brhaviour
-to increase professional orientations, attitudes and commitment
-to increase teacher abilities to clarify objectives and determine readiness levels
to motivate and evaluate pupils

-to reduce prejudice
-to increase personal orientations
-to increase the use of indirect methods of teaching
-to develop a preference for a democratic teaching style

Relative to these qualities, Becher and Ade suggest that placement sites can be viewed developmentally in terms of the differential contribution which can be made to students. Their categories are as follows

1st - opportunities for the student to explore and to test, to be innovtive and to value innovation
2nd-opportunities to indicate competence in good pedagogy
3rd- opportunities to exhibit competence and initiative

The message from this research is that placements sites can be identified by their strengths and weaknesses relative to the students needs at any point in the training program. Placement sites should be evaluated and matched against their ability to offer students the most effective experience, at the point in the training when the student can benefit most.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment as it relates to teacher education is a term which has ridden into popularity on the back of competency based education. The term connotes a relationship to measurement, evaluation decision making and the determination of competence. It also implies an inventorying of both process and product. Ryan and Cruz define assessment as

> a process of inventorying an individuals strengths , weaknesses needs and personality characteristics, knowledge, skills and attitudes useful in relating the roles demanded by the environment with the roles the individual is able to play (1974)

In many ECE teacher preservice programs, the practice component is the primary source of evidence of a student's competencies.

Evaluation, on the other hand is the consideration of a set of measurement data relative to a particular standard or norm. Evaluation practices tend to focus on desired changes in the individual, and the degree to which the desired standard is achieved with little regard for the characteristics of the environment which produce these changes.

Assessment and evaluation practices in ECE preservice teacher education programs reveal many common features. In the main assessment is done by the cooperating teacher who completes a form on behalf of the student. Often this information is supplemented by reports of an evluative nature completed by the teacher educator, or faculty advisor. In some cases, the student's own

evaluationis also a considered component, although this is a relatively uncommon practice. In the more traditional teacher education programs, and in ones which focus on the development of the technicl skills, the assessment and evaluation usually results in a grade being assigned to the student. This can have more disadvantages than advantages. It does, undoubtedly, encourage the conservative conformity on the part of the student to the perceived values of the placement site. Further, a mark enhances the status of the cooperating teacher and the modelling influence becomes stronger as she is a source of power over the practicing student. In this way, the competitiveness of the current marketplace undermines the positive effects that the evaluation of practice can often provide.

To counter some of these disadvantages of evaluation practices, many programs have instituted a pass-fail system. In such programs, the purposes of the evaluation and assessment are primarily to have the student become aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses and to be motivated to improve relative to their own perceptions and expectations. This system is deemed to be more postively rewarding for personal growth, and compatible with the 'peopleteaching' philosophy of teacher education discussed earlier. The pass-fail system has some value in fostering risk-taking and innovativeness on the part of students.

To date there has been little published research on the effects of either the grading or the pass-fail systems. Recently, a small investigation was undertaken of the results of a non-evaluated practice. Similarly, this author undertook to examine this practice. Students were not to receive a formal evaluation in the form of marks, grades, or reports, but were nevertheless, still to receive regular performance feedback from the cooperating teacher. After completing the experience, students were interviewed. They claimed that they felt under less pressure to 'perform', were more able to try new ideas without the same fear of failurs, were more sensitive to the children and less concerned about the rules and routine procedures of the program. Cooperating teachers supported the student perceptions of more initiative and risk-taking, and noted that they seemed more relaxed and more naturally enthusiastic. The experience of non-evaluated practice is an alternative which needs further exposure.

Knowing the value of raising the level of self-awareness in effecting positive behaviour change, more attempts to incorporate self-evaluation should be undertaken. Students could, for example, engage in

-completing self-evaluation forms
-observing and reporting on each other
-undertaking self-review by means of either audio or videotapes.
-completing comparison exchange visits

At Ryerson, for example, we have used some of these combinations with a fair amount of success. In the

second year of the four year program, students get instruction in operating video equipment, then are paired to videotoape and critique each other. The 'teaching' students sets the feedback analysis criteria, based on her objectives for the activity and the nature of the teaching situation. Reports with the analysis are submitted to the advisor, but the advisor is not involved in the video replay. The same procedure is carried out wih audio tapes. In addition, for each placement experience, the student is required to visit another placement of a similar types and include a brief comparison report in the journal she submits to the faculty advisor. Some students will complete an evaluation form on theselves and submit this to their faculty advisor before they received the one completed by the cooperating teacher. With all these strategies, there is the attempt to shift the responsibilty for the professional development of the students to the students themselves, with the cooperating teachers and the faculty advisors playing roles as consultants and resource personnel. Students truly become 'active agents' as Zeichner has advocated.

Supervision

The roles and relationships of supervisors to students is the component of the field practice experience which has been the most extensively researched. Faculty teacher educators, cooperating teachers and administrators as school principals and program directors all have power relationships and influences over the student teacher.

Using an incident inventory and a Likert-style scale, ApplegaTe and Lasley (1980) investigated the problems cooperating teachers had with preservice students. Students were found to be

-lacking in enthusiasm and professional attitudes
-often absent and tardy
-unable to operate equipment
-lacking competencies in conducting lessons
-unquestioning about either the program or children
-low in curiousity

On the whole the cooperating teachers felt that the students had little understanding of the 'partnership of teaching'. Low on their scale were weaknesses in planning and organizational abilities. As a group, the cooperating teachers felt that they were unfamiliar with the goals and objectves of thc teacher education institution. One suggestion was the development of orientation programs for cooperating teachers to the task of supervising and evaluating students.

In his thesis research, Dufresne (1980) also examined the discrepancy between the perceived role, the actual performance and the reasons for the discrepancies iN the functions of the school principal relative to student

practice. Some of the main tasks of this role are the establishment of a positive climate in the setting, the provision of orientation sessions for the students, and the promotion of cooperation between the program of placement and the teacher education institution.When principals, students and faculty advisors were survyed, the results revealed that all groups differed in the extent to which the role functions were perceived to be appropriate. Students in particular saw the performance level on these role aspects to be lower in practice than they saw to be appropriate. This study's results further support recognition of the need for improved communications to improve supervision.

Horwood (1981) also examined the relationship between associate or cooperating teachers and the students in practice. He claimed that there was little or no evidence of any theory or rationale guiding the student cooperating teacher relationship. Rather, a 'rule of thumb' directed interactions. He identified three interaction models.

1. the master apprentice model - in which the role of the cooperating teacher was seen as initiating the student into the accepted professional value system. In its finest form, this model included some mutual observation.

2. the idiosyncratic model - which was described as one of mutual support, and most dependent upon personality variables. In this model there seemed to be a lack of regular feedback, and a lower frequency of observed lessons combined with limited direction.

3. the brewmaster model - described as a composite of the first two and characterized by the inability of the cooperating teacher to clearly articulate program guidelines, leaving the student to learn by trial and error, with the main guidance being provided through materials that were made available.

Horwood concludes by noting that each model has the possibility of limiting the potential for learning new aspects of teaching behaviour.

The faculty advisor role has also been studied. In their examination, Martin and Sheehan (1982) examined this role from the perspective of the cooperating teachers. The following tasks were identified by them as the responsibility of the faculty supervisor and ranked in order of importance

-observing the student in action
-helping the student to analyze his or her strengths and weaknesses
-discussing goals, plans and consequences
-observing the interaction and rapport between the student and the children
-advising the student on methods and making suggestions for improvement

It is interesting to note that although one of the commonest behaviours is the last listed, it was not ranked by the

cooperating teachers as beingimportant for faculty supervisors. Possibly they felt that it was within their mandate. The cooperating teachers did identify two areas where they felt that the unIversity supervisors could improve. The first was in their knowledge of the school system and the environment of the particular school and classroom situation. Secondly, they recommended that the supervisors spend more time observing and counselling the students.

Lamb and Montague (1982) also examined the variable pertaining to the perceived effectiveness of faculty supervisors. Ratings of the supervisors were completed by 318 cooperating teachers and 264 students. The results noted that the helpfulness of the university supervisor in developing teaching skills of the student teachers was minimal. However, in a somewhat contradictory vein, previous classroom experience was not named as the key to more effective supervision by the university supervisors. Rather, the undercurrent of positive interpersonal relationships and an open communicative environment were the features which made the supervision be perceived as effective.

Instead of surveying how they were perceived by others, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1982) interviewed supervisors in order to assess their priorities . They were found to be concerned with evaluating effectively, yet aware of the constraints of their supervision. They all claimed to practice clinical supervision, emphasizing 'reflective teaching'. They found most distasteful, however, the over-emphasis on the technical aspects of teaching by cooperating teachers and students alike. In their report, the authors recommend the use of pre-observation conferences between supervisor and student.

Ahnell and Driscoll (1981) offer a model of supervisory functions based on the generic definition of supervision as 'looking after'. These are

1. support - by providing information, resources and psychological encouragement.
2. feedback - data on the performance of the student
3. direction - by communicating objectives and goals relative to the student's performance.

In their examination of supervision, they note that the effectiveness is determined by two key factors; the quality of the human relationships and the clarity of the communications.

Thorlacius (1980) outlines an approach for improving supervision. He urges training in clinical supervision and bases his recommendation upon the results of evaluations he conducted with teachers who had experienced workshops focusing on freeing them from directive styles, hierarchical outlooks and instead helping them to be more oriented to interpersonal relations and a collegial atmosphere. Supervisor behaviours were videotaped and coded. The changes in the supervisors behaviour were highly

significant, with concomitant positive effects on students. The positive supervisor behaviours were -

-is supportive in manner
-accepts and uses others ideas
-solicits information
-solicits opinion or suggestion
-provides solicited information
-provides solicited opinion or suggestion

Glassberg and Sprinthall (1980) approached the improvement of student practice from yet another perspective. They conducted seminars which included structured role-taking based on observations and analysis of one's own teaching and on the practice of cooperative supervision where students supervised and observed each other. They claim that these seminars had positive psychological impact on students, highlighting their ability to differentiate emotions, to process concepts at more abstract levels and to be more field independent. Commenting that teachers at more complex levels of functioning are more effective, the authors cite recent work in developmental theory as the basis for their investigations and propositions, suggesting that this area of knowledge could have powerful implications for teacher education.

Two other concepts have relevance to the content, if not the process of supervision. The first is termed 'leniency errors' This happens when supervisors over-estimate competencies of students. It is a phenomenon observed when supervisors are familar with the students.

The second concept has been termed the 'sophistication gap'. This describes the situation when the student is offered a strategy or technique for a particular classroom problem by the supervisor. It is often te case that for the strategy or technique to be effective, much expertise, and confidence and competence is needed by the teacher. When the student tries the suggestions and meets failure her anxiety and frustration is intensified.

These points support both Zeichner's view of students as 'active agents' and the humanist trends in teacher education. In her recent paper Wendt (199982) summarizes the mood of much of the current practices and policies related to the practice in the professional preparation. She notes that self-awareness is the key to effective performance and that the professional preparation is basically a process of self-discovery. Supervisory practices should be based on more adequate assumptions about the student's value, attitudes and perceptions and enhance self-awareness, self direction and self evaluation.

Based on these perspectives the following suggestions are offered

1. orientation sessions be held for cooperating teachers
2. supervisors be trained in clinical supervision procedures

3. cooperative supervision be implemented where possible

4. pre-observation conferences be part of the supervisory visit

Summary

It has been said that teachers need
the accumulated knowledge of an encyclopedia,
the financial skills of a banker,
the adaptability of a chameleon,
the courage of a persecuted saint,
the subtlety of a serpent,
the eyes of hawk,
the gentleness of a dove,
the patience of Job
the strength of a lion,
the hide of a rhinoceros,
and the perseverence of the devil.

The challenge of the field practice experience can demand these. It is encumbent upon those involved in the preparation of professionals for the field of early childhood education to ensure that the challenge is truly there.

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